

What is claimed is:

1. A method of matching a first party to a second party, the method comprising:

(a) collecting information concerning the first party, the information comprising attributes of the first party, the attributes of the first party comprising at least one qualification of the first party and a level associated with said at least one qualification of the first party;

(b) entering the information collected in step (a) into a first database;

(c) collecting information concerning the second party, the information comprising attributes sought by the second party, the attributes sought by the second party comprising at least one qualification sought by the second party and at least one of a skill level and a priority level assigned by the second party to said at least one qualification sought by the second party;

(d) entering the information collected in step (c) into a second database;

(e) matching the first database and the second database to form a matching database;

(f) using the matching database to match the first party to the second party to form a match; and

(g) informing at least one of the first party and the second party of the match.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the attributes of the first party comprise a plurality of qualifications of the first party, the plurality of qualifications being classified into a plurality of areas and, within each of the plurality of areas, a plurality of sub-areas, each of the plurality of qualifications having a skill level assigned thereto.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the attributes sought by the second party comprise a plurality of qualifications sought by the second party, the plurality of qualifications sought by the second party being classified into the same areas and sub-areas into which the qualifications of the first party are classified, each of the plurality of qualifications sought by the second party having a skill level and a priority level assigned thereto.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein step (f) comprises calculating a matching rank for the first party and the second party in accordance with the skill levels of the first party and the skill levels and priority levels assigned by the second party.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein each of steps (a), (c), and (g) is performed over the Internet.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein:

a server is provided, the server being connected to the Internet to communicate over the Internet with both the first party and the second party; and

steps (b) and (d)-(f) are performed on the server.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein step (f) is performed at times independent of times at which either the first party or the second party is in communication with the server.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein step (f) is performed periodically.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein, in each of the first database and the second database, the at least one time period of availability is indicated by beginning and ending times.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein each of the beginning and ending times is selected from a plurality of options.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein, in each of the first database and the second database, each of the plurality of options for each of the beginning and ending times corresponds to a field whose value is one of a logical "true" and a logical "false."

12. The method of claim 1, wherein step (g) comprises:

- (i) providing a notification of an existence of the match;
- (ii) collecting payment for details of the match; and
- (iii) providing the details of the match.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein:

the information collected from the first party further comprises confidential

information about the first party;

the information collected from the second party further comprises confidential information about the second party; and

5 none of the confidential information about the first party or the second party is released to the second party or the first party, respectively, until after the payment has been received.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the information concerning the first party further comprises an indication of at least one time period of availability of the first party; and

10 the information concerning the second party further comprises an indication of at least one time period of availability sought by the second party.

15. A system for matching a first party to a second party, the system comprising:

communication means for (i) collecting information concerning the first party, the information comprising attributes of the first party and an indication of at least one time period of availability of the first party, the attributes of the first party comprising at least one qualification of the first party and a level associated with said at least one qualification of the first party, and for (ii) collecting information concerning the second party, the information comprising attributes sought by the second party and an indication of at least one time period of availability sought by the second party, the attributes sought by the second party comprising at least one qualification sought by the second party and at least one of a skill level and a priority level assigned by the second party to said at least one qualification sought by the second party; and

20 database means for (i) entering the information concerning the first party into a first database, (ii) entering the information concerning the second party into a second database, 25 (iii) matching the first database and the second database to form a matching database, (iv) using the matching database to match the first party to the second party to form a match, and

(v) informing at least one of the first party and the second party of the match through the communication means.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein the attributes of the first party comprise a plurality of qualifications of the first party, the qualifications being classified into a plurality of areas and, within each of the plurality of areas, a plurality of sub-areas, each of the plurality of qualifications having a skill level assigned thereto.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the attributes sought by the second party comprise qualifications sought by the second party, the qualifications being classified into the same areas and sub-areas into which the qualifications of the first party are classified, each of the plurality of qualifications sought by the second party having a skill level and a priority level assigned thereto.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the database means calculates a matching rank for the first party and the second party in accordance with the skill levels of the first party and the skill levels and priority levels assigned by the second party.

19. The system of claim 15, wherein the communication means comprises means for communicating with the first party and the second party over the Internet.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the database means forms the match at times independent of times at which either the first party or the second party is in communication with the communication means.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein the database means forms the match periodically.

22. The system of claim 15, wherein, in each of the first database and the second database, the at least one time period of availability is indicated by beginning and ending times.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein each of the beginning and ending times is selected from a plurality of options.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein, in each of the first database and the second

database, each of the plurality of options for each of the beginning and ending times corresponds to a field whose value is one of a logical "true" and a logical "false."

25. The system of claim 15, wherein at least one of the first party and the second party is informed of the match by (i) providing a notification of an existence of the match, (ii) collecting payment for details of the match, and (iii) providing the details of the match.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein:

the information collected from the first party further comprises confidential information about the first party;

the information collected from the second party further comprises confidential information about the second party; and

none of the confidential information about the first party or the second party is released to the second party or the first party, respectively, until after the payment has been received.

27. The system of claim 15, wherein:

the information concerning the first party further comprises an indication of at least one time period of availability of the first party; and

the information concerning the second party further comprises an indication of at least one time period of availability sought by the second party.

28. A method of matching a plurality of first parties to a plurality of second parties, the method comprising:

(a) maintaining a database server storing:

(i) a first set of data comprising attributes of at least a first subset of the plurality of first parties;

(ii) a second set of data comprising attributes sought by at least a second subset of the plurality of second parties;

(iii) a third set of data comprising queries submitted by at least a third subset of the

plurality of first parties, the queries concerning products; and

(iv) a fourth set of data identifying the products with at least a fourth subset of the plurality of second parties;

(b) producing a first set of matches by matching the plurality of first parties with the plurality of second parties in accordance with the first and second sets of data; and

(c) producing a second set of matches by matching the plurality of first parties with the plurality of second parties in accordance with the third and fourth sets of data.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein, for each of the second set of matches, the second party is notified of the query and prompted to connect to the database server to retrieve the query.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the second party is notified of the query via electronic mail.

31. The method of claim 29, wherein the second party is notified of the query via a network message.

32. The method of claim 29, wherein, when the second party connects to the database server to retrieve the query, the database server marks the query as under review.

33. The method of claim 28, further comprising:

permitting one of the second parties to offer a survey to at least a fifth subset of the plurality of first parties; and

collecting responses to the survey in the database server.

34. The method of claim 28, further comprising permitting one of the second parties to offer distance learning to at least a sixth subset of the plurality of first parties.

35. A system for matching a plurality of first parties to a plurality of second parties, the system comprising:

(a) a database server storing:

(i) a first set of data comprising attributes of at least a first subset of the plurality of

first parties;

(ii) a second set of data comprising attributes sought by at least a second subset of the plurality of second parties;

(iii) a third set of data comprising queries submitted by at least a third subset of the plurality of first parties, the queries concerning products; and

(iv) a fourth set of data identifying the products with at least a fourth subset of the plurality of second parties; and

(b) a processor for:

(i) producing a first set of matches by matching the plurality of first parties with the plurality of second parties in accordance with the first and second sets of data; and

(ii) producing a second set of matches by matching the plurality of first parties with the plurality of second parties in accordance with the third and fourth sets of data.

36. The system of claim 35, further comprising a communication device for communicating with the plurality of first parties and the plurality of second parties, and wherein, for each of the second set of matches, the communication device notifies the second party of the query prompts the second party to connect to the database server to retrieve the query.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein the communication device notifies the second party of the query via electronic mail.

38. The system of claim 36, wherein the communication device notifies the second party of the query via a network message.

39. The system of claim 36, wherein, when the second party connects to the database server to retrieve the query, the database server marks the query as under review.

40. The system of claim 35, wherein the database server permits one of the second parties to offer a survey to at least a fifth subset of the plurality of first parties and collects responses to the survey.

41. The system of claim 35, wherein the database server permits one of the second parties to offer distance learning to at least a sixth subset of the plurality of first parties.

42. A memory for storing data in a computer, the memory comprising:

a computer-readable storage medium; and

5 a data structure stored in the medium, the data structure comprising:

a first data table storing identifying information about an entity;

at least one second data table storing characteristic information on the entity, the characteristic information comprising an identification of a category to which the entity belongs; and

at least one third data table storing descriptive information about the category.

43. The memory of claim 42, wherein the data structure comprises a relational database.

44. The memory of claim 42, wherein:

the first data table identifies the entity by an identification field;

the at least one second data table also identifies the entity by the identification field;

and

the first data table is linked to the at least one second data table by the identification field.

45. The memory of claim 42, wherein:

20 the at least one second data table also identifies a subcategory, within the category, to which the entity belongs; and

the data structure comprises at least one fourth data table storing descriptive information about the subcategory.

46. A method for storing data in a computer, the method comprising:

25 (a) providing a computer-readable storage medium; and

(b) storing the data in the medium in a data structure comprising:



a first data table storing identifying information about an entity;

at least one second data table storing characteristic information on the entity, the characteristic information comprising an identification of a category to which the entity belongs; and

at least one third data table storing descriptive information about the category.

47. The method of claim 46, wherein the data structure comprises a relational database.

48. The method of claim 46, wherein:

the first data table identifies the entity by an identification field;

the at least one second data table also identifies the entity by the identification field;

and

the first data table is linked to the at least one second data table by the identification field.

49. The method of claim 46, wherein:

the at least one second data table also identifies a subcategory, within the category, to which the entity belongs; and

the data structure comprises at least one fourth data table storing descriptive information about the subcategory.

50. The method of claim 49, further comprising:

(c) searching the data structure by the category and subcategory; and

(d) displaying a search result of step (c).

51. The method of claim 46, further comprising:

(c) searching the data structure by the category; and

(d) displaying a search result of step (c).

add A1

add B1

add C2